



How do I support someone?

When your friend is going through a difficult time, sometimes you want to help but don't know what to do. This resource can help you work out what to do.

One of the most helpful things for a young person going through a hard time is knowing that someone else noticed and cared. Let's look at how you could do this for your friend.

Simply being there matters

You do not need the right words to say to your friend. You just need to be there. This may be as simple as checking in to make sure they are okay or spending time with them. It does not need to be anything big.

How to start the conversation

Having a conversation can help if you've noticed your friend seems a bit distant or different lately. It can be tricky to know where to start. Try one of these questions:

- ◉ 'Do you want to walk to class together?'
- ◉ 'How's your day going?'
- ◉ 'You seem a bit quiet; is everything okay?'
- ◉ 'Is there anything I can do to help you?'
- ◉ 'Is something wrong?'
- ◉ 'Do you know that I'm here if you ever need to talk about something?'
- ◉ 'Are you okay? You don't need to talk about it if you don't want to.'

'Small acts of kindness that say, "I'm here, I understand," can be far more powerful when someone is struggling than others realise.'

– YOUNG PERSON, PROJECT
ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH
COLLECTIVE

If your friend doesn't want to talk yet, that's okay. Let them know that you've noticed and you're there. Check in again later. Sometimes just knowing someone noticed is enough to start with.

'Having a safe person is someone who you know you can talk to, and it will make you feel better.'

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What helps and what doesn't help

What can you do to help?

- ◉ Listen without trying to solve the problem.
- ◉ Let them know that their feelings are real and matter.
- ◉ Stay with them, even if it feels hard. Being with your friend, even if you're not talking, shows that you're there to support them.
- ◉ Be present.
- ◉ Believe them and take them seriously.
- ◉ Ask them how you can help.
- ◉ Invite them to sit with you.
- ◉ Let them know they are not alone.
- ◉ Encourage them to talk to a trusted adult, such as their parent or carer.
- ◉ Check in with them.

What you shouldn't do

- ◉ Make their feelings seem unimportant or tell them they're overreacting.
- ◉ Say things like, 'Just ignore them,' or 'It will blow over.'
- ◉ Jump straight into giving advice.
- ◉ Pressure them to talk before they are ready.
- ◉ Laugh at the situation.
- ◉ Promise to keep a secret if someone isn't safe.
- ◉ Put yourself in an unsafe situation to solve the problem.
- ◉ Assume the problem has gone away just because someone stops talking about it.

Note

Your support is especially important if your friend is being targeted because of who they are, such as their background, how they look, their culture or something else that makes them different. This kind of harm is often dismissed by others. Believing what they say and supporting them matters.



Note

You don't need to know exactly what to say or do. Just letting someone know they are not alone can make a real difference.



Note

It is important to tell a trusted adult if you think someone is unsafe or needs help. This is always the right thing to do.





When it is bigger than peer support

It is important to help someone when they need it. But some situations need help from an adult. If your friend is experiencing bullying or other harmful behaviour, one of the most helpful things you can do is encourage them to talk to a trusted adult. You could help them do this. If they are not ready, you could speak to a trusted adult for them or offer to go with them to talk to the adult.

Note

If the first person doesn't help, tell someone else. Keep trying. You can also talk to someone at the support organisations listed in the 'Where to get more help' section at the end of this resource.

Looking after yourself

Supporting someone through something difficult can be hard. It is okay to check in with yourself too. Think about what you need, and talk to a trusted adult for support.

Next steps

Work through the checklist below. It lists things you can do for a friend who is going through something hard. You do not have to do all of them. Even one small act can help.

Use this checklist to help a friend who is experiencing bullying or other harmful behaviours.

- ☐ I have checked in with my friend and let them know I am here.
- ☐ I have listened, without trying to fix the situation.
- ☐ I have not pressured my friend to talk before they are ready.
- ☐ I have not laughed along or stayed silent when something unkind happened to my friend.
- ☐ I have not shared what my friend told me with others (who don't need to know) without their permission.

- ☐ I have let my friend know it is okay to talk to a trusted adult and that if the first person doesn't help, to keep trying.
- ☐ I have offered to go with them if they decide to tell someone.
- ☐ I have checked in with myself and talked to someone if I need support.
- ☐ If I am worried about my friend's safety, I have told a trusted adult.

Note

If you need to tell a trusted adult to keep you or your friend safe, this is okay.



Note

Being a good friend does not mean knowing exactly what to say. It means being there for them.



Connected resources

- ◉ Something is off: identifying early signs
- ◉ Who's in my corner?
- ◉ What happens next?

Where to get more help

If you need further support, help is available:

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or kidshelpline.com.au. Free, confidential counselling for bullying and other harmful behaviours, school issues, online harm and wellbeing, available 24/7.

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636 or beyondblue.org.au. Mental health support for stress, anxiety or overwhelm, available 24/7.

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au. Crisis support and counselling if things feel overwhelming, available 24/7.

Dolly's Dream Bullying Support Line: 13 36 55 (13 DOLLY) or dollysdream.org.au. Counselling and guidance for children and young people experiencing bullying and other harmful behaviour, available 24/7.

headspace/ehespace: 1800 650 890 or headspace.org.au. Mental health, wellbeing and early intervention support, available 9 am–1 am daily.

1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732 or 1800respect.org.au. Sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling line for anyone who has experienced, or is at risk of, family and domestic violence and/or sexual assault, available 24/7.

13YARN: 13 92 76 or 13yarn.org.au. Culturally safe 24/7 support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

QLife (LGBTIQA+ young people): 1800 184 527 or qlife.org.au. Free, anonymous peer support and referral service, available 3 pm–9 pm daily.

eSafety Commissioner: esafety.gov.au. Report cyberbullying, get advice and request content removal support.

Australian Human Rights Commission: humanrights.gov.au. Support for cases involving discriminatory harm. Reports can be made via their website or by emailing infoservice@humanrights.gov.au.

State, territory and non-government education sectors will reflect the expectations of the National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian schools in their policies and procedures by Term 1 2027. This includes making reasonable efforts to initiate a response to bullying and harmful behaviour within two school days, recognising that further time may be required to fully address the issue. By Term 1 2027, all schools will also publish or link to policies and procedures that align with the National Framework (or equivalent contemporary jurisdiction specific Frameworks) and their local policies and school context.